

Building Spiritual Awareness, Fitness and Resiliency

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In October 2016 the Commandant of the Marine Corps released an ALMAR (033/16) addressing Spiritual Fitness in the Marine Corps.¹ In it he emphasized that Marines are not only physical, mental and social beings, but also spiritual; that spiritual resiliency is an important part of overall well-being and the individual's ability to "grow, develop, recover, heal and adapt." The Commandant has asked the Marine Corps as a whole to begin reflecting on the meaning of spiritual well-being and what it means to become spiritually resilient in the same way Marines strive to be physically, mentally and socially strong. In addition, the Commandant has on his reading list the book, *What It Is Like to Go to War*² by Karl Marlantes, a highly decorated Marine of the Vietnam War. Marlantes addresses his experiences of war in the context of its psychological and spiritual effects, and how preparation and training *for* war, and exercises and programs *after* war can better mitigate the results *of* war on the individual warrior as well as self-awareness in actions and decision-making *during* war.

Reformed theologian John Calvin begins his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with the statement, "without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God. Nearly all wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and ourselves."³ The purpose of this article is to introduce the thesis that knowledge of self can be developed through the contemporary understanding of psychological type, and that the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) can be used as a tool to not only deepen our knowledge of ourselves in general, but be used to develop our knowledge of God as we use related exercises in order to build spiritual awareness, understanding and resiliency according to our unique personality.

The Christian Scriptures tell us that humans have a soul and that the essence of the human connection with God is in the soul. The fundamental depth of our being is our soul and

the home of our personality traits is the soul. The soul is comprised of three parts – mind, body and spirit and is defined by Webster’s Dictionary as “the principle of life, feeling, thought, and actions in humans.”⁴ The three parts working in harmony provide what is necessary to have a resilient spirit. The interplay between mind, body and spirit is paramount in our understanding of their nourishment of the soul. There is a continual triangle of movement and interplay between the three parts – in the exercise of our spirit we are using our mind and our body, in the exercise of our body we are addressing our mind and our spirit and in the exercise of our spirit we are using our body and mind. To have balance in all aspects suggests a very holistic view of life.

The United States Marine Corps defines spiritual fitness as “an optimal state of the overall spiritual well-being of a person that touches on three fundamental elements: personal faith, foundational values and moral living.”⁵ As Marines and Sailors who are physical, mental, social and spiritual beings, it is necessary to have practical spiritual resources which can be added to the toolbox of training and leadership development to strengthen an individual’s spiritual well-being. The MBTI is a readily available resource among Navy Chaplains.

The use of Psychological Type is simply one technique to develop our knowledge of true self and the nourishment of our soul in our quest for knowledge of God, higher power or noble path. The root word of psychology is *psyche*, meaning the human soul. Thus, to understand our spiritual make-up and how we practice spiritual disciplines is grounded in our knowledge of our soul type. As we learn our type in general, and specifically our spiritual profile, we reflect and act (through spiritual disciplines such as prayer, meditation, worship, music, arts and crafts, community or acts of service, nature, study, physical exercise or even sleep) on who we are and how our spiritual personalities interact with our faith or belief in a higher power. Our spiritual

journey is a life-long one in which we are growing all the time and should therefore never be wholly satisfied with where we are 'at' as we recognize that there is always room for growth.

The place to start is to determine our particular psychological type. As we know, every individual has their own genetic make-up and though God 'broke the mold' after birth, there are, however, common characteristics in individual personalities which can be noted as similar in others and grouped accordingly. These universal characteristics were originally noted in a publication by Carl Jung in 1923 and became known as psychological type. Katharine Briggs had begun her own research in 1917 and after Jung's publication Briggs expanded her research, and in conjunction with her daughter, Isabel Briggs Myers spent the years 1923-1941 developing their typological ideas and theory. The period 1942-1962 was spent testing and refining their work until it began to be utilized in the mid-1960s as a useful tool for clinicians and researchers.⁶ Their work is now known as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and is the most well-known tool for measuring type. It is possible to use the MBTI to explore how we practice our spirituality according to our soul type.

The MBTI is not a test but a self-reporting instrument which assumes that type is inborn, and its results sort individuals into one of each of four dichotomies which address how an individual relates to the world. The first dichotomy addresses the direction of an individual's energy - Extraversion (E) /Introversion (I); the second, how an individual gathers data - Sensing (S) / Perceiving (P); the third dichotomy addresses how an individual makes decisions - Thinking (T) / Feeling (F); and the fourth dichotomy determines the individual's orientation to the outer world - Judging (J) / Perceiving (P). The first and last pairings (E/I and J/P) are described as attitudes whilst the middle pairings (S/N and T/F) are regarded as functions. Sixteen possible

combinations are identified and every individual falls into one of the sixteen types, for example ISTJ.

At this point it is necessary to give a brief overview of what Type theory calls the dominant and auxiliary functions which in turn leads to the *Shadow*.⁷ Each individual in their four letter MBTI profile has a Dominant and Auxiliary function. The first and last letters of the four letter combination are called the *Attitudes* while the middle two letters represent the *Functions*. Of the two *Functions*, the individual has preferences for each which in turn is described as the *Dominant* (the most preferred function, and the one we use the most as it is the most reliable and trustworthy/the *Commanding General*) and the *Auxiliary* (the second most well-developed and dependable function/the *Loyal Lieutenant*.) The third most developed is called the *Tertiary* function, is the opposite of the Auxiliary function and is used more in the unconscious than the conscious. The *Inferior* function is the least developed of the combination and it is the opposite in every way of the Dominant function. It is also the gateway to the shadow. As an example, for an ISTJ (the most common military type), the Dominant function is an introverted Senser, the Auxiliary is extraverted Thinker, the Tertiary is Feeler, and the Inferior is extraverted iNtuitive. The two Inferior functions are sometimes of themselves called the Shadow. Our Shadow type is also sometimes described as the four letter combination which is the opposite of an individual's actual type. For example, the Shadow of an INFJ is ESTP, the Shadow of ISTJ is ENFP etc.⁸

The pathways presented in Figure 1 can be used as a guide for the individual to explore their spirituality according to MBTI preferences and are intended to open the individual to new aspects of their spirituality in their search for, and journey toward, wholeness. The chart is oriented toward discovering some of the primary characteristics of one's unique personality as it

relates to the spiritual life. Each of the eight MBTI preferences is listed across the top while categories of the spiritual life are listed in the first column. The words or phrases in each category are meant to help the individual gain a better understanding of their particular spirituality and are not strict definitions. Note that, while the “Natural Spiritual Path” suggests the primary orientation of a particular type (such as “Action”), the category, “Needed for Wholeness” indicates the opposite orientation (“Reflection”) that is needed for a balanced spirituality. For example, an ESTP wants action, service, knowledge and discipline in the spiritual world. However, for spiritual wholeness, the ESTP also needs to incorporate reflection, awareness/understanding, devotion and spontaneity into their practices.

Retired General James Mattis in a video interview entitled *Leadership Lessons*, responds to the question “How do you keep improving as a leader to meet the demand of each role in your career?” He notes that “not only is it necessary to stay teachable as a leader and to be a better warfighter at the end of each week than at the beginning; it is essential to maintain the body, mind and spirit at all times in order to be the physically toughest, the mentally sharpest and the most spiritually undiminished possible.”⁹ Later in the same interview Mattis declines to name one of the eleven leadership principles as more important than any other because they are all parts of the whole, and there is therefore no way to separate them. The same can be said when applying spirituality to the leadership principles. Spirituality is a necessary component of all the principles, in the same way it undergirds the six functional areas of leadership development – fidelity, fighter, fitness, family, finances and future.

Without knowledge of self, there can be no knowledge of God; without knowledge of God there can be no growth or development of the spiritual elements of a Marine seeking overall fitness and resiliency. Psychological type and the MBTI profile (along with associated spiritual

exercises) is a valuable tool to give individuals the ability to understand themselves more effectively, and thus grow in their spiritual awareness and resiliency. An analogy which can be used is that of a three-legged stool with each of the legs representing mind, body and spirit. If one of the legs is weak or broken, the stool will fall over. Humans are multi-dimensional beings, designed to live our lives aware of our mind, body, spirit and community. All of these elements inform our relationships with both humanity and God. The MBTI spiritual profile is a valuable tool for exploring avenues of spirituality which take us beyond our traditional constructs and to accept practices to which we are naturally drawn as legitimate soulwork. The MBTI spiritual profile can encourage Marines to engage in legitimate soulwork to build spiritual awareness, fitness and resiliency as they develop leadership, decision-making skills and teamwork.¹⁰

¹ United States Marine Corps ALMAR 033/16, *Spiritual Fitness*, <http://www.marines.mil/News/Messages/Messages-Display/Article/962784/spiritual-fitness/> (accessed 5 January 2017).

² Karl Marlantes, *What It is Like to Go to War*, (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2011).

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1960). Ed. John T. McNeill, 35.

⁴ *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (New York, NY: Barnes and Noble, 2003, 1822).

⁵ United States Marine Corps, *Spiritual Fitness Communications Plan*. <https://www.milsuite.mil/book/docs/DOC-312537> (accessed 4 January 2017).

⁶ Isabel Briggs Myers with Peter B. Myers. *Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Type* (Mountain View, CA: CAPT, 1980).

⁷ Marlantes addresses the existence of the Shadow primarily in Chapter 5, *The Enemy Within*. Jung's Shadow refers to "an archetype which is an innate mode of psychic behavior, in reaction to certain situations. There are archetypal modes of action and reaction, processes, attitudes, ideas and ways of assimilating experience. The shadow as an archetype is that part of Collective Unconscious which intrudes itself into the personal sphere, forming the Personal Unconscious. It personifies everything that people refuse to acknowledge about themselves, such as inferior traits of character and other tendencies incompatible with and unacceptable to their conscious, ego-dominated view of self." (Naomi L. Quenk, *MBTI News*, Vol.4, Number 2, 1982.)

⁸ When stationed at Naval Submarine Base New London, CT (2008-2012) one of my responsibilities was Brig Chaplain. On one occasion there were 6 young Sailors from the Basic Enlisted Submarine School (BESS) in pre-trial confinement for getting involved in a drug ring. When I administered the MBTI to them, all 6 were either ENFP or INFP. These two types in particular have a natural disregard for rules and regulations. Experience has taught me that if a Marine or Sailor is in their first enlistment, and is under the age of 24 years, he/she will struggle in the military environment if an ENFP or INFP, and is the type most likely to 'get into trouble.'

⁹ United States Marine Corps, *Leadership Lessons from Gen. James Mattis (Ret.)* <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/488201/leadership-lessons-gen-james-mattis-ret> (accessed 13 January 2017)

¹⁰ This article is based on the author's Doctor of Ministry Thesis, *The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator as a Tool for Spiritual Growth: A Case Study Among Female Chaplains in the United States Navy*, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2016. The ISTJ spiritual exercises are offered as an example of how to build spiritual resiliency.

The cartoon is the work of CWO2 (USMC, Ret.) Matt Andrew.